

The Rama story is known in Thailand as Ramakien. Kien is Sanskrit kīrti. Ramakien is Rāmākīrti, the glory of Rama. In Thai Sanskrit kīrti is met with in two forms : kit (sirikit < śrīkīrti) and kiyar. It is the second form which on account of the Thai system of pronouncing final r as n becomes kiyan.

The Rāma story is found in Thailand in diverse forms; in folklore, in literature; in the performing and the visual arts. It must have become ^{popular} there as early as the Sukhothai period (about 700 years ago) for the names of the various places in the story such as Rāma Cave, Sītā Cave are found mentioned in some of the ancient inscriptions. In the Ayudhya period (A.D. 1350-1767) there could have been written several works which unfortunately are not available at present. The evidence for their existence is ^{found} available in references to them in some of the contemporary works. Thereafter King Taksin of Thonburi (1767-1782 A.D.) wrote a poem on the basis of some episodes of the story which is widely read even to this day.

King Rama I, the founder of present Chakri dynasty of Thailand (A.D. 1782-1809) had composed a long poem of about ten thousand stanzas on the basis of the story. It being too voluminous, a shorter version of it was prepared by King Rama II, his son and successor, for purposes of theatrical performances. King Rama VI of the same dynasty had presented a deep analysis of it and tried to discover its sources. According to him the Thai Ramakien is derived from the Bengali version of the Rāmāyana, the Visṇupurāṇa, the Hanumannāṭaka and other indigenous elements. In the northern, north-eastern and southern regions of Thailand there exist folk versions of the story which are still well-received by the people.

In this context the city of Lopburi in the central part of Thailand deserves special mention. The region around it is a store-house of Rāma stories. There are villages in it which still carry names after the Rāmāyanic characters : Rāma village, Sītā village, Hanumān village and so on. According to experts the name Lopburi itself is connected with the Rāma story; Lop being the changed form of Lōva, one of the sons of Rāma.

About the founding of the city there is a folktale which runs as follows : After the conquest of Lankā Rāma decided to reward all those who had rendered special help to him in his mission of rescuing Sītā. Vibhīṣana he made the ruler of Lankā, Jāmbavān

that of Pātāla and so on. He did not give anything to Hanumān, however. The great monkey who had helped him the most had been waiting all the while for his turn among the recipients of the reward. When everybody else had been rewarded and his name was not called out, he approached ^{Rāma}him and asked as to why he had not ^{given} anything to him in spite of the best assistance he had offered him. Rāma realized his mistake and told him that he would shoot an arrow and that the place ^{where} it would fall would be his. He asked him to follow the arrow. Hanumān did likewise. The arrow fell at Lopburi. That being uneven at that time Hanumān first levelled it with his tail. Afterwards Viśvakarman at his request laid a city for him of which he became the ruler. The city was named Lopburi. The place where the arrow fell got burnt by the ^{is}force of the arrow's and turned green. There is a rock at present in the centre of the city which is green in colour. The popular belief is that represents the point where the arrow of Rāma had fallen. ~~The~~ devout to come to worship it. Till a few years back they would chip it off and carry a small piece of it as a sacred relic back home. They cannot do so now; the rock having been declared a protected monument to save it from total disappearance due to incessant chipping.

In the realm of performing art the story of the Ramakien is used exclusively in the staging of Nang and Khon. In the Nang the Ramakien characters cut from cattle hide are artistically moved from behind the well-lit screen so that their shadow can be seen. Nang has two forms, one big and one small. The big one is called Nang Yai and the small one Nang Talung. In Nang Yai the size of the characters is many times larger than in Nang Talung and are placed ⁿin front of the screen. If placed at its back, it is not possible for its shadow to fall on it. Very often it is presented on a stage without screen.

In Thailand a number of religious monuments have sculptures from the Ramakien. The more noteworthy of them are Prasad Panom ^Rung in the Province of Buriram and Prasad Hin Pimai in the Province of Nakhon Ratchasima. Prasada means temple. It is a Sanskrit word which the Thais have adopted as such. Besides ~~sculptures~~ sculptures there are bas reliefs, as many as 152 in Wat Po or Wat Jetubon, the funerary temple of the royal dynasty in Bangkok which depict the scenes from the Ramakien in serial order. In the same way depict the same 178 murals in Wat Phra Kaeo or the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, again in Bangkok, along its galleries.

In the context of the Ramakien--not only in the context of it ~~on~~ only but also in the context of the Pha Lak Pha Lam of Laos and the Ramaker of Kampuchia

one thing that needs special mention is change in the pronunciation of the names of the Rāmāyānic characters. The languages like Thai, Lao, etc. are monosyllabic ~~in character~~ and the change in the pitch in words in them leads to change in their meaning. This accounts partly ~~in~~ the change in the names therein. Further, some of the Sanskritic sounds are pronounced differently in them. d is pronounced mostly as th; deva > theva; devī > thevī; devatā > thevada; Nandaka > Nonthuk; Mandodarī > Montho or as t; Daśaratha > Totsarot; Daśakantha > Totsakan; v and bh as ph; Vālī > Phālī; Kumbhakarna > Kumphakan; g as kh generally; Nagara > Nakhon; or k occasionally Sugrīva > Sukrip, medial t as d; Sītā > Sidā. The three sibilants s, ś and ṣ are reduced to only one, s; Satrughna > Satrud. Cerebrals are converted to dental and then subjected to further change; Jatāyu > Sadāyu; the words are abbreviated occasionally if found too long, with retention of only one part of theirs and the omission of the rest of the part; Lakṣmana > Lak; Vibhīṣana > Bhībhek; Mandodarī > Montho; it is occasionally as a result of this phenomenon that that last syllable of words is dropped and from the original a-ending they are turned consonant-ending ones; Daśakantha > Totsakan; the syllable tha is dropped here; Mahiravana > Maiyarāb; the syllable na is dropped here. Syncopation is common enough feature of Thai and other languages of the region: Bharata > Phrot. Conversely, a vowel is inserted inbetween conjunct consonants; Indrajit > Intarachit; j becomes ch in these languages. a commonly pronounced as o as in the eastern region of India as can be seen in many of the instances quoted earlier; Totsarot, Totsakan, Mantho, Phrot. Sometimes it is plan simplification that leads to change in words; Sūrpanakhā > Samanakhā.

More wellknown for Ravana in Thai is Totsakan but Ravana also is used in the company of the word asura with r of it as pronounced as n: Rāphanāsun < Rāvanāsura. There is no phonetic change in two names in Thai, Rāma and Hanumān. In Lao, however, the r of Rāma is pronounced as l. So Rāma is Lām there, Hanumān is Hanumon there or Hullamān.

The Thai Ramakien has certain characters that just do not figure in the Indian Rāmāyana. They are ~~Nandaka~~ Nonthuk, Nandaka; Anomatan; Benjakai; Suvarnamacchā, Suvarnamatsyā; Macchānu, Matsyāhanu; Chiuha, Jihva; Malivaggabrahmā or Malivarāj; Cakravartī (a friend of Ravana); Vainysaravong (a son of Ravana born after his death). More than one character there bears a name different from that of the Valmiki Rāmāyana. Thus Valmiki is called there Vajmrga, Kusa as Maṅkut, Rasayānga as Kalaikot, Kaikeyī as Kaikasī. Sometimes for a character on a base less prevalent is preferred.

in Indian Rāmāyana is preferred in Thai. Mantharā is not called there as such but as Kucchī or Kubjī or Kubjā which just means hunch-backed and which also occurs in the Vālmiki Rāmāyana. In the Ramakien Sītā is said to have had only one son, Maṅkut. The other son, Lava, Vālmiki creates with Yogic powers.

It is a practice in Thailand as also in Laos to prefix the ^{word} Phra (in Laos it is Pha only, r is not pronounced there) to the name of some one whom one holds in respect, somewhat like Śrī in Sanskrit. This word is prefixed even to the names of the deities, Phra Phrām, Brahmā, Phra Isuan, Īśvara, Phra Narāi, Nārāyana, Phra In, Indra. With the ascription of divinity to the sun and the moon the word is prefixed to their names too, Phra Āthit, Āditya, Phra Chān, Candra. The human characters in the Rāmāyana being worthy of respect have Phra prefixed to their names, Phra Rāma, Phra Lak and so on. Phra probably is Sanskrit vara. v in Thai and other languages of the region is pronounced as ph. With syncopation vara becomes vra; with v pronounced as ph, it becomes phra. It means best, excellent, śreṣṭha. Just it is a practice to use Phra before the names of ~~characters~~ male characters worthy of respect, in the same way is the practice to use Nang before the names of the ~~characters~~ female characters worthy of respect.

~~xxxxxx~~ The writer of these lines has composed a twenty-five canto Sanskrit Mahākāvya, a long poem, based on the Ramakien, the Rāma story of Thailand under the title Śrīrāmākīrtimahākāvya. In the context of the above Mahākāvya a question was put to him repeatedly. That was : What is the difference between the Indian Rāmāyana and the Thai Ramakien, the Thai Rāmāyana ?

